

An:Other

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Submitted to the faculty of the Herron School of Art and Design  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art  
in the Herron School of Art and Design  
Indiana University

May 2018

An:Other

By

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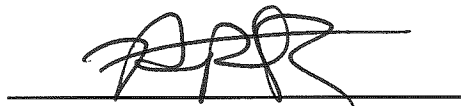
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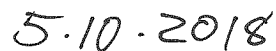


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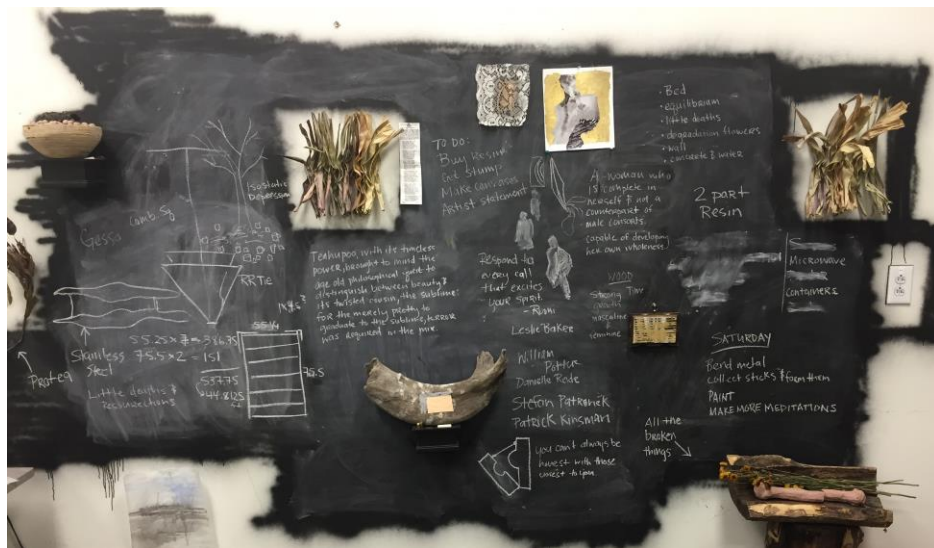
Otherness comes in many forms: it is a profound awareness of the metaphorical and physical space between, whether that space is the distance between two people, a person and the world they live in, or the perceived self and the internal self. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote extensively on the notion of the Other throughout his career, and my work is a response to these ideas. For Levinas, the mask was the veil that is put on and becomes motionless and expressionless as whatever within us that makes us recognizable takes leave.<sup>1</sup> Personally, I believe that this mask is not a single one but many diverse and evolving disguises we create, mold, and replace as we travel along the continuum of life. The idea of the mask is the way I choose to represent and recognize the fluidity of my own identity. The mask I display at any given moment, consciously or unconsciously, is dependent upon both situation and company. Through the metaphor of the mask, I explore the intensity of emotion brought on by a questioning of identity and a sense of Otherness. The emotion I'm most interested in during this process is contemplative melancholy. I'm attracted to the sadness and the darkness or empty searching in people because it's an inherent fact of life and its presence in the world makes me feel alive as it gives me something to contrast the more uplifting or life affirming moments against. In my work I aim to bring to light the pervasiveness of the feelings of Otherness and malaise as deeply relatable truths of the human condition.

Two years ago, at the beginning of my graduate studies, the primary focus of my practice lied within the sculptural realm. I aimed to understand the human experience from an unemotional, distanced, and objective overarching perspective, as the scientist I have been trained to be. I collected, compiled, and analyzed data all the while dancing around the human form but never daring to take it on as my central subject matter. The complexities of the psyche and its effects on the physical form seemed too intricate to wrangle. I was scared of the intimacy and vulnerability I would need to address the topic I was drawn to, so the human as a cold abstraction, a laboratory subject, is where I remained. The data I collected came from an expansive range of interests as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *God, death, and time*. Stanford, CA: Stanford U Press, 2000. Print.

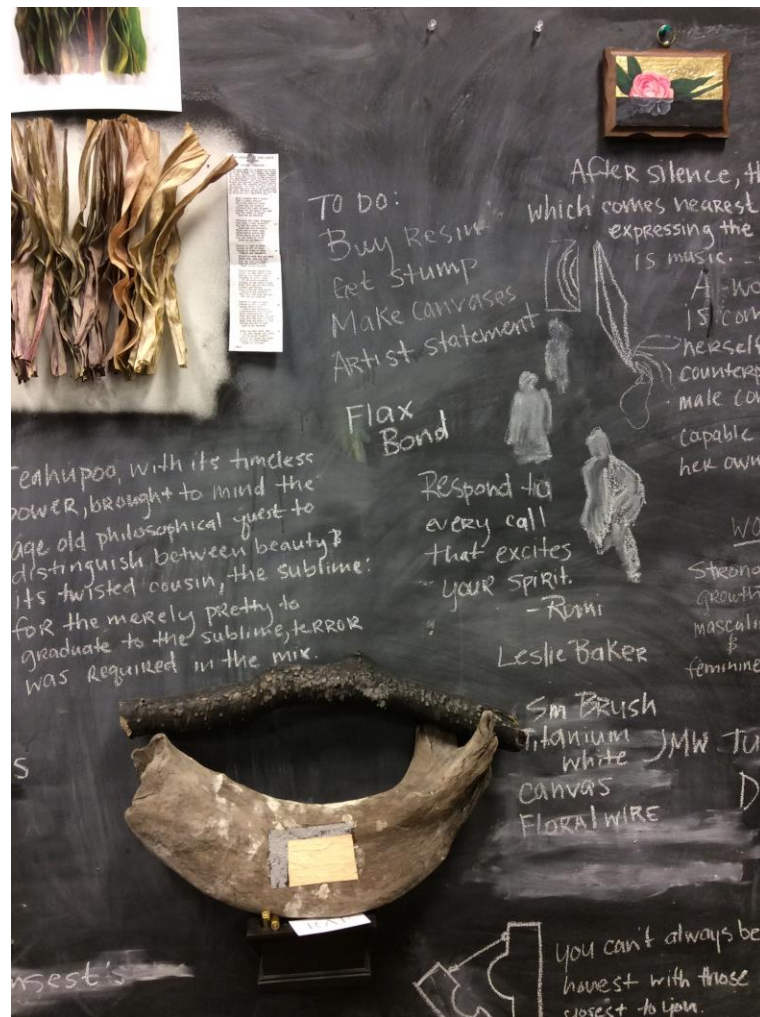
observations derived from personal experiences. I felt strongly that the objects and words I brought together were connected by a truth that could only be felt, not rationalized, and that by placing certain words and objects next to one another, I could potentially arrive at conclusions that I would not have otherwise drawn. I chose this information and made these sub-works through a close attention to and trust in my own intuition, moving by sense rather than logic. This process can be seen most evidently in an ever-evolving installation called *Excerpts From A Grand A Priori*.



Excerpts From A Grand A Priori, 2016  
Mixed Media on Drywall

This piece was a constantly developing work that transformed day by day based on the influences I was receiving at the time, the books I was reading, the objects I was making or finding, and the moods I was experiencing. It was a living and breathing installation. A “grand a priori” is a Kantian idea of the sublime that in simplistic terms means “a greater knowledge.” Therefore, this piece, as well as several others in the series all share the same name, but are considered to be separate works under the umbrella of a larger body of work. They are snippets of a grand knowledge that exists in the universe which I was attempting to tap into and make sense of by utilizing and documenting my highly personal and seemingly random experiences. This idea came

out of the notion that the entire universe makes sense if you view it from the appropriate scale. I wanted to find the scale of my internal world, or at least discover whether it was possible to recreate legibly. *Excerpts From A Grand A Priori* is a hint of the beginning of an eventual preoccupation with my own fluidity of selfhood.



Excerpts From A Grand A Priori (Detail), 2016  
Mixed Media on Drywall

Ultimately, I discovered that the subject I was evolving toward during this phase of my artistic development was more effectively arrived at from a different and more immediate angle. I found that the human form was the missing puzzle piece necessary

to fully explore my ideology. My sculptural pieces had been addressing the thoughts and inner workings of the mind but the face is what emotes the climate of the internal landscape. Soon, it became clear that, for me, the emotive ability of the body and the expressive physicality in the handling of paint alluded to the internal being more effectively than object making. This is when I really began to focus on portraiture.

From the beginning of my artistic career, the questions I have been addressing have been “what does it mean to be human?” and “What defines me?” These are expansive questions but ones that humanity has been considering since the dawn of our existence. The lines are slowly, yet steadily, becoming blurred with the advent of ever advancing technology and improvements in material sciences. Our intellectual capacities are being uploaded to clouds creating a singularity of knowledge but a deficit in individual intellect, and our entire beings can potentially be mimicked with terrifying accuracy, so much so that we’ve developed the phrase, “uncanny valley,” to describe our unease at a machine possessing just a bit too much humanity. These technological advances, while incredible, have removed the necessity for direct interpersonal human interaction. The more “advanced” we become, the less contact we seem to have with those around us. The fissures that hinder understanding between people are pried further apart as new technology addresses the question of humanity. What is it that brings us back to an awareness of other people? Part of it is being face to face with them and seeing yourself reflected back to you in their eyes. It’s the small, specific details, and the imperfections, that define the poetic in a person. With technology we are paying less attention to those details and the poetry of life is diminishing. My work, in part, addresses this. It forces the viewer to look another person, see their beautifully perfect flaws, and really try to understand their situation. So what is it that gives humans our humanity? What makes me, me? I feel that it is the empathy and the intensity of emotion that I am capable of. It is the subtle adaptations or masks I have created as a natural process of life to become the person I need to be in each moment of the day while hiding the emotions that could betray me and it is the sincerity with which I truly am all of those versions of myself. I believe each one of us possess an infinite number of masks, or whatever analog you identify with, whether we are acutely aware of our

momentary “costume changes” or not. We have different roles we play throughout our days and our eyes, expressions, energy, and attitudes reflect the waves of change as our roles morph. The philosopher Heraclitus made an observation that has been distilled in modern terms to say “No man steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.”<sup>2</sup> This shift is, in part, what I mean when I refer to the mask. At each point in our lives we are a singular accumulation of all of our past experiences revolving around 8 billion other mutually exclusive and discrete accumulations. The various ways in which we interact with those around us is a result of lessons implemented out of a constantly evolving set of relational involvements. I believe we all become the people we have to as the moment demands and this is how I define the allegorical taking on of the mask. We can never put the same mask on twice. These masks are representations of the tactics we use to relate to Others in the world but they can also create the grand sense of Otherness that I feel, and I’m told many people feel as well. As a whole, I have observed that the majority of people have fragmented personalities, always concealing some portion, and only showing carefully curated parts of themselves to each person they meet. Our masks are many.

A secondary aspect of my meaning of the mask is a quite literal one. My study of masks from cultures around the world and their uses informs the way I approach both the depiction of certain emotions as well as the application of paint in those depictions. Joseph Campbell tells a story about the initiation rituals of young men in one of the world’s most primitive societies. He says the boys are brought up in fear of the masks the men wear in their rituals. They are the Gods. They are the personification of the powers of the structure of society. The boys, when they become more than their mothers can handle, are given a terrifying and enlightening experience. The men will come into their homes wearing the masks. They grab the boys, who believe they are being kidnapped by the Gods, and take them out to the “men’s ground” where they are forced to stand up and fight a man with a mask. In the minds of the boys they are each

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<sup>2</sup> Graham, Daniel W. “Heraclitus.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, 8 Feb. 2007, <[plato.stanford.edu/entries/Heraclitus](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Heraclitus)>

fighting a God. The Gods let the boys win and immediately remove their masks and place them upon the faces of the boys. In this society the mask represents the power of the society and now that the boys have triumphed over the Gods they are individual representatives of that power and responsible for everything that comes with it. The boy becomes a man in that moment through destruction of his innocence and entrustment of power conveyed by the transfer of a mask. He is no longer his mother's responsibility, but his own.<sup>3</sup> This is the most literal sense of the exchanging of masks but this can also happen metaphorically. The moment our masks are changed is an act of destruction. To become someone new, I must more or less demolish the older versions of myself and reconstruct from the pieces, thus shedding my skins and shedding my masks. It is in these transitional moments a person must destroy a piece of themselves in order to create and I think in that instant of eradication of one mask, a hint of our true identities, our true selves, beneath all of the disguises peeks through. In *Masks and the Semiotics of Identity*, Donald Pollock says, "Masks, as I will argue in these specific cultural contexts, are iconic inasmuch as they resemble, and are also indexical, inasmuch as they draw upon dimensions or extensions of their objects to signal their representation."<sup>4</sup> The vulnerability exposed in that moment, if met with the appropriate response, lessens the sense of Otherness and soothes the intensity of emotion felt in these instants. Each time we exchange one identity for another, in this borderland between two selves, categorization of selfhood becomes less certain. I've beaten the God but have yet to bear his mask. In this moment am I a boy, a man, or a God?

There is an instant when we are caught off guard, just as we notice that we have been seen but before we have put on a mask to cover ourselves that fascinates me. It is a profound moment of unintentional vulnerability. As if when looking in a mirror each person is ultimately a reflection of myself, what I'm giving to them and what they are getting from me thus forcing me to see a version of myself that is not wholly me. The

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell, *On Becoming an Adult*.  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=aGx4llppSgU>

<sup>4</sup> Donald Pollock. *Masks and the Semiotics of Identity*. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (Sep., 1995), pp. 582.



truth in a portrait is ultimately the product of a collaborative energy. It is simultaneously me, them, both of us, and neither of us. My own captivation with this very specific moment of interchange stems from an acute awareness that I have drastically different behavior and self-imposed ideas of identity depending on the company I'm in. I can actually feel the switchover happening and I find this terrifying but incredible. The fear and awe that such disconnection between the parts of myself could and does exist intrigues me. It is of particular significance in my work. This captivation directs me to attempt to reduce my sense of foreignness by inserting myself emotionally and occasionally physically into other people's worlds creating a feeling of understanding in the viewer. Most often I choose to use the eyes of my subjects as the entry points to this empathy. Eyes have the ability to convey every emotion through the most miniscule of movements. It is an evolutionary fact that humans have adapted to be able to recognize these nearly imperceptible micro-expressions and translate them into complex levels of meaning. In "The Whites of Their Eyes: The Evolution of the Distinctive Sclera in Humans," Joanna Bickham cites Michael Tomasello, an American linguist, developmental and comparative psychologist,

The researchers suggest that humans may have lost the pigmentation of the sclera because of an increase in terrestriality, an increase in body size, and the use of tools and fire, which may have made humans less susceptible to predators. This, coupled with an increase in cooperative and mutualistic behaviors, may have necessitated gaze signal enhancement instead of obfuscation. These factors would have reduced or eliminated the necessity of the protective feature of the darkened sclera while selecting for improved communication via clearly visible gaze signaling... Their evidence, that humans are more attuned to eye-

based gaze redirection, supports a theory that humans use their eyes more complexly in communicative interactions.<sup>5</sup>

I take full advantage of this in my work. The eyes, in my opinion, are the only physical attribute capable of fully communicating when words fail. Their expressive power is universally understood. The gaze is everything.

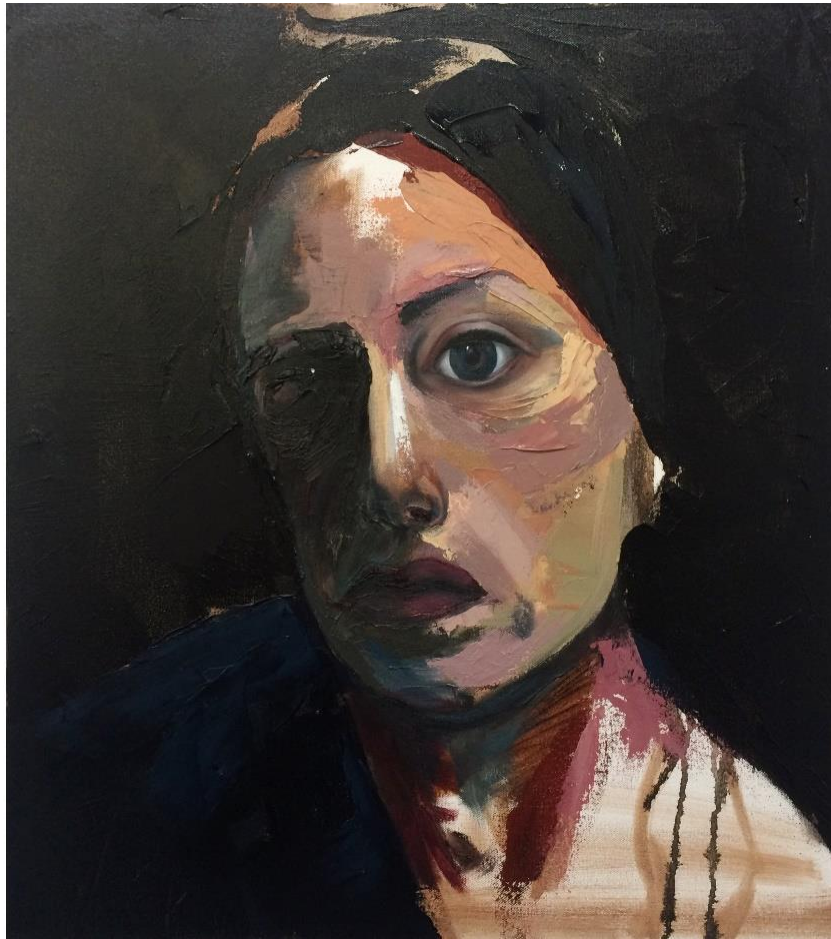
The materials that I employ in my visual research are vast and chosen depending upon the message and tone I am intending to provoke. Therefore, they are about pragmatism rather than a strict adherence to one method or medium. I do however, most often tend to gravitate toward oil paint, clay, natural plant material, and most recently, silicone. It is the intuitive nature required by these materials that endear them to me. They have minds of their own and I must be receptive to following them down paths I can't plan for. This relinquishment of an element of control never fails to promote a sense of curious play that introduces fresh elements into my work.

Within single works, I often place contrasting material applications against one another; gestural and expressive moments are set next to clean, tightly rendered ones. These points of juxtaposition further emphasize a sense of Otherness and support the disconnection within the subject matter. It is only through the recognition of a difference that we become aware that a distance exists. For example, *Illumination* is a perfect example of the illustration of my central theme as depicted through material application. It represents the ways in which there are parts of myself that I don't show the world while there are other aspects that I allow to come into clear focus and, at times, even amplify. It explores the idea of plasticity of being; that I always have a part of myself that I don't show to the world or that is still in development and can't be revealed. In this painting I have taken this notion and translated it into a self-portrait. The only clearly rendered and in focus portion of the figure is the foremost eye.

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<sup>5</sup> Bickham, Joanna. The Whites of their Eyes: The Evolution of the Distinctive Sclera in Humans. Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Pg. 23. James Madison University – Epsilon of Virginia. 2008

The entire left half of the face is shrouded in darkness with a single point of light breaking through in the area of a catch light. For me, this is the moment, or potentially the possibility of a moment, where the hidden parts of myself are available to be witnessed. This moment is a transition between two masks.



*Illumination*, 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
18 x 20 in.

*Illumination* tackles my perception of the human experience. I have left a portion of the original gessoed canvas peering through because it allows the viewer to see all the layers in the paintings development thus exposing the process by which it came to be. Conceptually this is imperative. Humans are multi-dimensional beings and many of

these dimensions, or layers, are ever changing and incomplete. Some remain raw and find equilibrium in this “unfinished” state. The solid black of the environment surrounding the figure is a celebration of that which is yet to come but it is also a metaphor for the unknown or hidden within myself. When it comes to people it is impossible to know what you do not know; what they are unwilling to share. Additionally, it is an acknowledgment of all of the opposing forces and characteristics within the figure that have found a balance thus creating a sense of harmony or resolution out of the seemingly chaotic parts. One way this is accomplished is through recognition of the composition of the black paint and the physical properties of its components. To create what the brain reads as black I utilize two pairs of complementary colors; Alizarin Crimson/Sap Green and Burnt Umber/Phthalo Blue. These hues are mixed to create an infinite number of “color blacks.” In doing this I’m mixing opposing forces to generate a darkness that can be optically adjusted to be read as more in the foreground or background depending on the pigment ratios therefore creating a sense of presence through the appearance of absence or a “void.”

I view painting as a manifestation of my introversion. It is the moment I retreat into the sacred solitary space of my studio to contemplate life and the experiences I’ve had. It is the time that I withdraw, re-energize, and analyze. I paint portraits of people in two distinct lines of inquiry. These portraits range from a myopic perspective focused predominantly on self-portraiture to a wider exploration of the people intimately involved in my life. I do this in an effort to better understand my relationship to them and also as a way to really see and connect with them. I prefer for the subjects to be people that I know quite well because I like that certain intimacy of knowledge. This is not absolutely necessary though. What I seek is to share my own experience of people and to capture a sense of the mask they choose at any given moment. Most recently, however, the subject matter of greatest significance for me has been self-portraiture. I have addressed the topic of the Other as an investigation of identity from many directions throughout the duration of this program. Until most recently I have chosen to maintain a strict distance between the work and the direct investigation of myself as primary subject. My current body of work faces this head on. I have begun a deep

consideration of the poetics of my own fluidity of identity and how that affects my perception of my own selfhood as I move through a world that I don't quite feel embedded in. It is my contention that I am always present within my work even if the imagery isn't immediately read as figurative or even self-portraiture. The work is always me. This can be seen most overtly through my painting *The Foreign Familiar*.

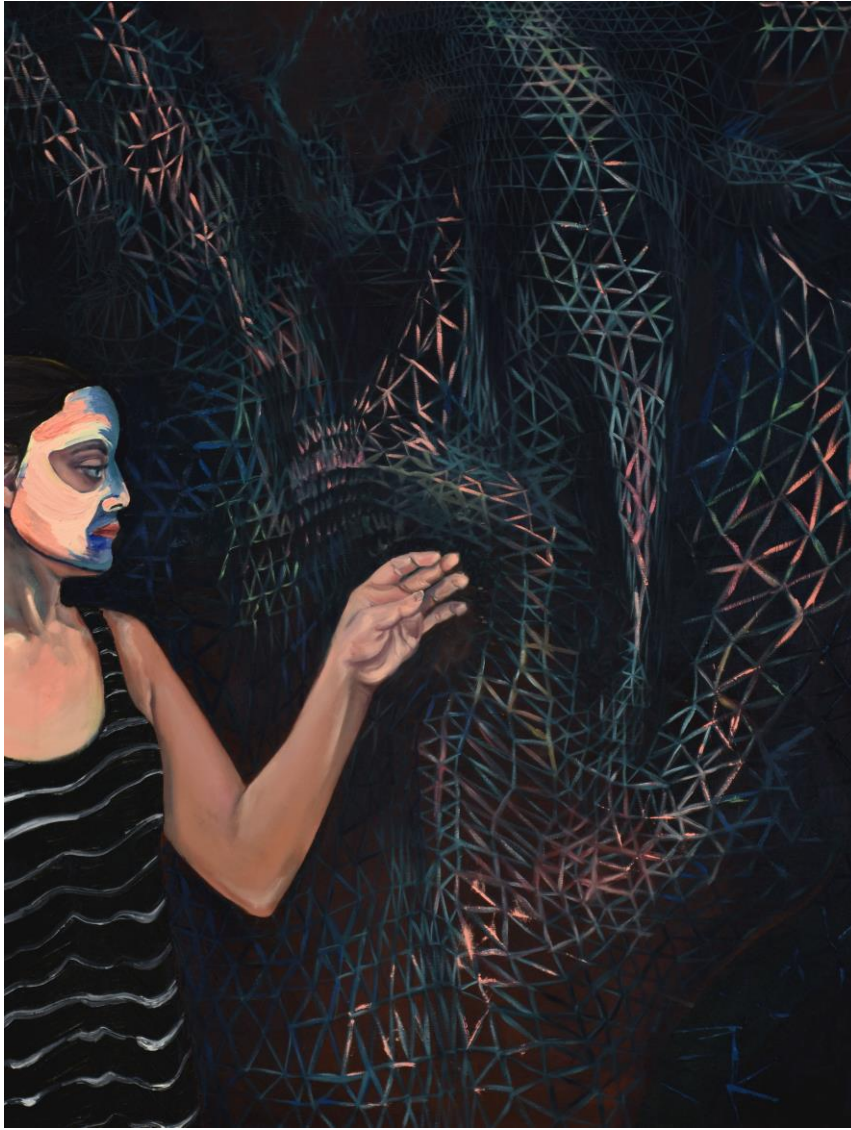


*The Foreign Familiar*, 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
90 x 48 in.

*The Foreign Familiar* is the artifact of two years of self-analysis and reflection. It is a representation of a personal struggle regarding the question of where an identity begins and ends and the fluidity of personality. It is also, perhaps to a greater degree, a depiction of the Otherness I feel in a world where my identity doesn't feel like a fixed state. In this work, I have chosen myself as the subject. Therefore, much like the color black paint mixtures I am so fond of the self-portrait becomes dependent on the parts to define the whole. It is a personal exploration of the many masks I wear and the ways in which those versions of myself interact with one another. I have invented an imaginative reality space separate from the world of my other works in which a cast of

“characters” that are all, in part, me, coexist in the same physical space. These characters vary in the accuracy of what I feel to be the truest representation of myself. Some are only slightly me and perhaps the remaining parts of the characters are created by their own hypothetical external factors. This relates to another element the work takes on; the void, which for my purposes, has three definitions. First, the void is the complete and utter emptiness where all is unknown, where everything and nothing can be questioned because there is no answer. Second, it is the space left behind after death where you are the truest representation of yourself that could ever exist. Third, the literal interstitial space that exists between one individual and another. The gap between two people that can’t be bridged. It is the emptiness where misunderstanding and otherness exists. It is also the barrier that insulates or protects the fragile sense of self that we all possess. In *The Foreign Familiar* this barrier is what can be seen as the middlemost figure reaches into the void. The “fabric” composing the space moves in response to her, creating a denser “wall” separating the two groups of characters. This provides her with a sense of awareness of the presence of Others but maintains and even amplifies their separateness from her.





The Foreign Familiar (Detail), 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
90 x 48 in.

Formally, this piece is oil paint on canvas with a dimension of 90 x 48 in. It contains twelve figures separated into two distinct groups that appear to be aware of one another but have no intention or ability to cross the divide between them. Upon second look, an awareness of the triangulation of the two groups to the viewer creates a sense that the viewer is not only looking at the figures but has become part of the consciousness of them, a link, at once separate and together. None able to cross the

surface of the canvas or the space between. Each figure is painted in a unique manner but all figures are unified through a carefully selected color palette. These colors are intended to initially read as whimsical or lighthearted, as a contrast to the harsh darkness of the background. Once the initial upbeat impression of the piece is taken in and the viewer begins to look deeper at the combination of expressions, body language, grouping, and costume, they glean an eerier, more profound meaning behind the pretty colors and whimsical patterning. All is not right in this world.

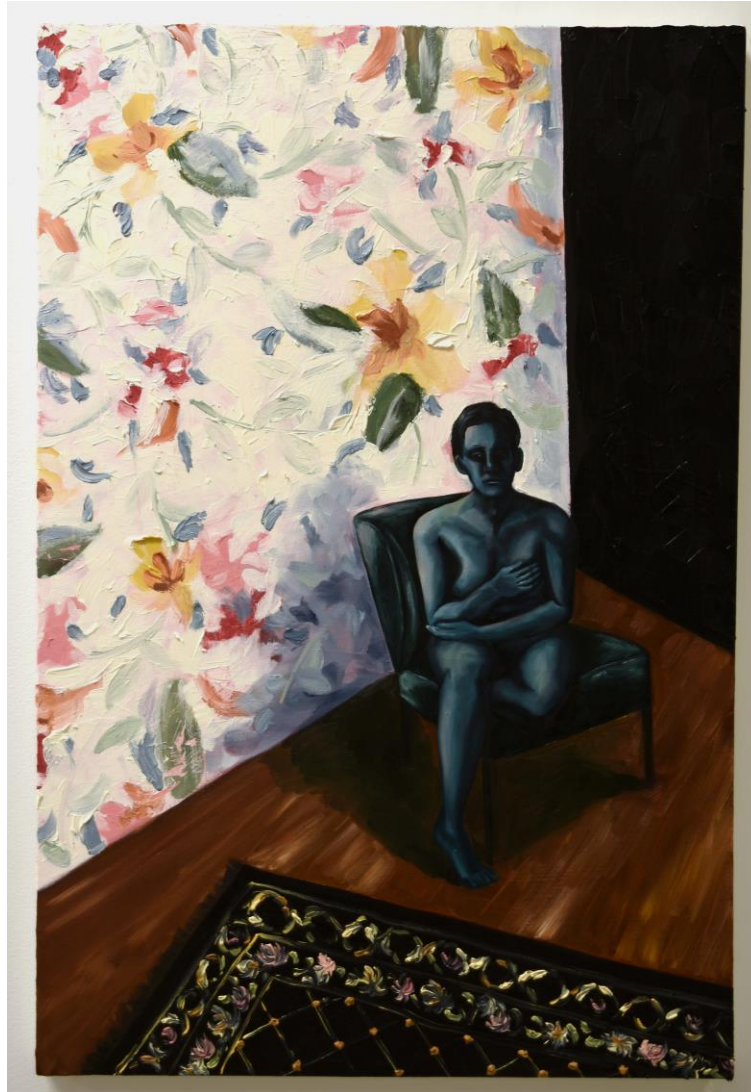


Broken, 2017  
Oil on Panel  
10 x 15 in.



The second line of inquiry I explore comes from images of people I find in a variety of ways. The majority of these images are black and white historical photos of ordinary people that have struck a chord in me. Perhaps, despite the distance that time creates, they in some way feel familiar. I enjoy the process of discovering myself, or some common ground, with people I will likely never meet and who have lived or do live in circumstances that I will never know. It is a practice of empathy and a little reminder that people are all just human. We have similar core experiences, desires, and insecurities; fear, pain, happiness, love, and death. *Broken* is an example of this. It was the conflict of emotions I felt coming from the woman who inspired this painting that kept me coming back. This is why I chose to paint her. I have felt this complex unnamable thing often while moving through the world. I have been wronged in such specific ways that I have been unable to explain why or even how in the language of absolutes and masculine thinking. The injuries of the feminine often can't be expressed in masculine terms to those who have not experienced them.

In my current body of work I focus on the image of the woman and the many masks she chooses to wear but also the ones imposed upon her by the very act of being a woman in contemporary society. When the paintings are viewed collectively they are an army of uncompromisingly strong, badass, women who all represent different aspects of the powerful women in my life, myself included. Many walk the line between vulnerability and confrontation. Some may be uncertain or feeling small or shying away from the viewer but their power always shines through. They are a metaphor for every woman whether she recognizes her strength or not. It is this sense of internal power confronting external vulnerability that I hope to convey with all the portraits of the women I paint.



*I Tried To Be Softer*, 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
24 x 36 in.

*I Tried To Be Softer* explores the very idea of femininity and what that means to a woman. The title is adapted from a line of poetry by Warsan Shire called “For Women Who Are Difficult To Love.”<sup>6</sup> This poem is about learning to accept yourself as you are rather than as the woman society has tried to mold you into. In this piece, the mask is the room itself. I utilize space as an imperative aspect of the narrative and define it

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<sup>6</sup> Shire, Warsan. For Women Who Are Difficult To Love. <<https://youtu.be/p7Agwv-RTew>>

through pattern and color. We, as humans, have a way of constructing our environments as extensions of ourselves. They are, for all intents and purposes, synonymous with prosthetics and jewelry. This piece is an expression of what could be interpreted as either a conflict or a symbiosis between the masculine and the feminine parts of the subject. It could also be read as a woman trying to exist in the world without losing herself. Most societies, though, were not made for the comfort of women. Because of this we do what is necessary to make ourselves feel protected, safe, and comfortable. We harden ourselves. This becomes part of who we are. The figure in this piece takes a tentative stance through her placement within the floral backdrop signifying a more defined relationship with the feminine although she remains close to the masculine force of the opposing wall. Adding conflict to this initial reading is her firm rooting on the wooden floor overseeing the ornately feminine rug from a distance. The figure is not overtly female and as a result does not initially read as such. Her lack of clothing is representative of her role as either a blank slate or a woman defeated by expectations and her hair could either be pulled back into a decidedly feminine ponytail or cut off completely. The room and her uneasy positioning within it are physical manifestations of her internal questioning. This is shown through her protective body language. She makes herself small, seemingly folding in on her own body while staying firmly rooted in place by grounding one real foot and four prosthetic feet, the legs of the chair, on the floor. She conceals both her heart and her breast thus giving the viewer very little access to her emotionally or physically. The monochromatic coloring of her body serves her in the same way, to limit our knowledge, but it also represents her emotional state in the way it quite literally overwhelms her figure.

Sculpture is the opposing force that my paintings play off of. It is an expression of extroversion. Much of this is purely process based. Sculpture is energetically expensive. It requires interaction, cooperation with others, coordination, and planning of events. This is simultaneously mentally, physically, and emotionally depleting. It is also the place that I must go when I no longer feel it necessary to be alone; when I crave human interaction. This comes out of the practical needs of sculpture, especially figurative sculpture. In painting, a single image will suffice as a reference point. This can

be acquired with ease from many sources and there is no real need to involve another person for extended periods of time. In contrast, sculpture requires multiple images or better yet, a model, which creates the necessity to place an imposition on someone else or a financial one on myself. Additionally, it demands making/moving large amounts of material and space. These are all quite extroverted and energy consuming activities but at times I need this counter balancing process in my practice. It provides the perfect contrast to the quiet solitude of painting. It also allows for a more visceral tone in some works that can only be created through the use of certain materials. For example, clay, with its gritty heaviness could never be mimicked in paint more effectively than being in the presence and weight of a clay form. This is the beauty of sculpture. I use it when a concept necessitates such nuances.

In the carefully chosen materials and stylistic freedom that my process affords me, the viewer can understand that every choice in my work is highly considered. Nothing is extraneous and often there are multiple layers of meaning that can be gleaned should the viewer choose to take the time and effort to investigate a work on a deeper level. However, upon first sight I wish for the viewer to feel the piece, to be drawn to it inexplicably, and to feel compelled to dwell in its presence for a while. I want the onlooker to first feel something deep within them or as Francis Bacon referred to it, I want the work to “first hit your nervous system.”<sup>7</sup> Then, if you must attempt to rationalize the feeling provoked by the work I would like it to be a secondary response. The fields of painting and sculpture play two very distinct roles in my artistic practice. They are direct representations of the opposing introverted and extroverted sides of my personality that ensures my work continuously moves forward.

I work with the human body as my subject because of its poetic complexity. We are at once simple and infinitely multifaceted beings. The physical form can be generalized but the real beauty lies in the highly specific details. It’s in those moments when something is entirely representative of one person; wholly emotive. The body as a subject in art has the advantage of being fully relatable to whatever viewer may stand

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<sup>7</sup> Sylvester, David, and Francis Bacon. *Interviews with Francis Bacon, 1962-1979*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1980. Print.

before it. In the image of a body we, as humans, will inherently look for ourselves. It is this fact that I make the most of in my work because the more we, as individuals, can find an access point into understanding or empathizing with those around us, the greater the impact of the experience in this thing called life. This relatability narrows the divide thus lessening the sense of Otherness between the viewer and the work and also the viewer and the subject matter.

My artistic influences are broad and extend outside of the visual arts to poetry, classical music, and various scientific principles. There are a couple of specific artistic movements that have been more impactful to me than most. One, specifically, is The New York School of the 1950s. Painters Robert Motherwell and Willem De Kooning stand out among the members of this group. Motherwell's intense use of black as a personified emotional force showed me the strength in a void. De Kooning's fearless depiction of the figure as an abstraction gave me precedent to let the emotive expression of the paint become more important than the formal realism of the figure. They taught me that things that don't seem to make sense often can and do if you teach yourself to be highly observant, relinquish a bit of control, and open up your definition of truth.



Burning House, 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
10 x 12 in

The Fauvists and the German expressionists gave me a better understanding of color and how to use it to provoke certain emotional responses. Color is a large part of my work, especially in painting, where I like to lean away from 100% realism and opt for a more psychologically impactful palette. These artists have been my mentors in paint mixing, brush control, and color theory. Max Beckmann, Emil Nolde, and James Ensor top the lists in these respects. *Burning House* is the painting in my collection that is most evident of my use of color as an emotional referent. The hot, red tones mimic the effect of firelight and convey a sense of heat. Red is the most visceral of all colors. It is the color of injury, blood, and the body. It is the color we are biologically programmed to associate with pain. It harkens back to our fertile origins, to the feminine, and to the

pain of labor. As with most things worth having we must go through some discomfort to get them and *Burning House* displays the agony associated with the process of birth whether that be biologically or artistically. This is further emphasized through the mark making. Its visceral quality is more concerned with the physicality of emotion than the perfect rendering of the figure. The title of this piece, if taken literally, is indicative of the actions occurring just outside the frame but it is also a metaphor for the psychological space in which we conduct our lives. Over the past two years, I have come to see the house as a metaphor for an entire world within the mind where life resides and plays itself out. This piece is the excruciating suspended pause as my entire world begins to burn and all that can be done is watch and wonder what will be born from the ashes.

John Singer Sargent and his philosophy of “Economy of Effort<sup>8</sup>” in which he was adamant about self-control and using the fewest strokes possible to express a fact have influenced me greatly. This can be seen in such places as the bravura strokes in the hand of *Walls* where one stroke of color effectively gives the viewer all the requisite information to discern a hand as well as a distinctly emotive gesture. Additionally, Sargent was a master at only putting forth extended effort into points of interest that he considered most necessary to the recognition of his subject and the tone of his piece. In this way, I too, choose the focal point of my work and only add details in those particularly vital moments. In the vast majority of my 2D work this focal point is the eyes. I strive to capture the majority of the poignant influence in a piece through the careful consideration and rendering of these emotive organs. It is through my Western cultural lens that I have adopted the perspective that the eyes are the locus of transformation in the figure. Other cultures have varying viewpoints regarding this but my own personal entrenchment within American culture has ingrained in me their importance as ‘the windows to the soul.’ This is not to say that the other characteristics of the body are without merit and deeply useful as iconographic or indexical entities but

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<sup>8</sup> Hulsey, John and Ann Trusty. John Singer Sargent’s Method. Artists Network. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=john+singer+sargent's+method&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

it is the eyes that are most telling in the vast majority of my work. They are at once guardians of the internal and betrayers of secrets.



Walls, 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
18 x 24 in

*Walls* is a work that is particularly open to interpretation. Moreover, it is the most classical, stylistically, of all my current work. I aim for it to reference the long-standing tradition of portraiture that I so admire but also for it to be capable of commenting on modern societal issues if that is what the viewer chooses to read. The figure is one of a woman in androgynous and imperfect clothing. Her body is at once there and not. Her face is highly rendered but judiciously covered by a flat, neutral, flesh



tone concealing her features beneath. Her eyes and body language reveal discontent, as does her placement within the composition. She uses the edge of the canvas as a shoulder rest implying either a box that can't quite be escaped or place from which to make her judgment. The paint application is highly restrained and lends itself to a sense of tension in the same way that the palette gives the viewer an impression of heaviness. The 'walls' in this image could simply be what she leans against or they could be the forces pushing against a woman in society. They could be the limitations she has set for herself within her own mind or, if the onlooker chooses to see the dark moment near her eye as a bruise rather than a shadow, the walls could be the thing guarding her from of some sort of physical damage. Architecture as a representation of the psyche is a common minor theme in my work but in this particular piece it's up to the view to decide whether the walls truly exist or whether they are simply metaphor. What is significant in the work is that it speaks to the viewer and reflects what that specific person chooses to see. My interest is in creating an empathetic audience.

Looking toward the future I have begun to consider a new project, which has taken me on a circuitous path back to the sculptural while still holding onto painting. I have found that the expressive and instinctual natures of both paint and clay serve me well. I have also found that the human form is an important component of my work as is a recognition and study of the exquisite myopic details that make up life. In my newest piece, *This City Is Full Of Ghosts*, I am making a series of clay masks and one silicone mask from casts of my own face. Each mask will be individually treated either by sculpting or painting. I am currently conducting material experiments to find the combination of treatment processes that will best serve me. The title is a continuation of a thought that I have often had about all the places and people I have been in the world but specifically the history I have with this city. I can remember the feelings of the people I have been during different phases of my life reflected in the architecture and sidewalks as I move through my days. I can remember the girl I once was with specific people and I don't always recognize them as 'me' anymore. They are ghosts of the people I no longer am able to be that linger in the streets. I have changed and left

them strewn about, occasionally forced to confront them. This project is an ode to all of the ghosts of the women I have been who watch me as I wear my current set of masks.

My work allows space for the unspoken internal moments of the individual human experience. It takes an instant to slow down, breathe, and meditate on the beautiful specific details. It invites the viewers to stay and contemplate their own experiences in relation to it. The stylistic juxtapositions mimic the feelings the works evoke that are at once clear and difficult to verbalize. The work is a consideration of identity and the fluidity of that concept in a world that is consistently trying to redirect or reject a person's selfhood, especially if that person is female. It is a general condition of being human that we wear many disguises and they separate us from one another. My work delves into the internal world, into the human capacity to feel. It accepts and explores a sense of Otherness and often lingers in the discontent and discomfort of the mysterious. Anish Kapoor said, "A work will only have deep resonance if the kind of darkness I can generate is something that is resident in me already."<sup>9</sup> In telling my single story I am communicating a larger awareness for a universally relevant experience that I hope will resonate with those who recognize the same parts of themselves in the work that reside in me.

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<sup>9</sup> "Anish Kapoor Quotes." BrainyQuote.com. Xplore Inc, 2018. 20 January 2018.  
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